

John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*: As a Metafiction

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ABSTRACT. This research aims at the studying of metafiction as a new literary phenomenon in the contemporary world to test its validity and suitability to it through the application of its theories to John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. It is a satisfactory example of metafiction under the guise of a Victorian novel, which enables it to analyze the evils of that age together with the futility of its fictional conventions. In this novel, Fowles presents his theory of metafiction through his concepts of reality, history and freedom and their relations to fiction.

Introduction

As a new term, metafiction is used to describe a kind of fiction that started in the 1960s and while it has been coined recently, its practice has much older roots as it goes back to seventeenth century Spain. But William H. Gass (1924-) a contemporary American novelist and critic is the one who has recently defined it as:

terms like 'metarhetoric' and 'metatheatre' are a reminder of what has been, since the 1960s a more general cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world⁽¹⁾.

This means that the meta-art phenomenon, which characterizes the western culture in the second half of the twentieth century, and "turns its attention upon the work of art itself, is prevalent in all media and art forms"⁽²⁾. This reflects the importance of the meta-phenomena, that is not only restricted to fiction, but extends to envelop all fields of art and literature in the contemporary world. On facing the term of metafiction for the first time, it arouses the reader's curiosity, as no definition of it can be found even in the latest dictionaries of literary terms or any literary anthology. Moreover, the few specialized critical studies of it mark its difficulty for any researcher. Such qualifications make metafiction deserve an analytical study to define it, trace its history, introduce its con-

stituents and examine its validity and suitability to the contemporary world. This is what the present study aims at through the application of the metafictional theories to John Fowles's (1926-) *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969).

In 1970 Robert Scholes was one of the first to use this term, and he defines it as a fiction "about the possibilities and the impossibilities of fiction itself"⁽³⁾. Hence metafiction is an interpretation and a commentary on the process of creating fiction; it is "fiction about fiction"⁽⁴⁾. 'Narcissistic narrative' is another term used to describe it, but the adjective 'Narcissistic' is used here not to describe the novelist, but the narrative work itself; to imply and stress its "textual self-awareness"⁽⁵⁾.

According to Inger Christensen in *The Meaning of Metafiction*, these definitions and others are too sweeping to mark the distinctive nature of metafiction, and they ignore what "is an essential aspect of metafiction – the novelist's message"⁽⁶⁾. Thus, he defines metafiction as "fiction whose primary concern is to express the novelist's vision of experience by exploring the process of its own making"⁽⁷⁾. If the novelist is only exercising his technical ability without conveying a certain message to his readers, one cannot consider his novel as a metafiction. To accomplish this message, the metafictionist does not only concentrate on the fundamentals of the narrative technique, but also on the important issues related to human life in general. His attitude to such fundamentals of the narrative technique is based on his views of existence; hence analyzing them will "reveal not only the writer's relation to art, but to reality as a whole"⁽⁸⁾. This indicates that the novelist's message is basically related to the form of his writing. The metafictionists' opinions upon the important issues of human life may differ, but this difference can only be revealed through their various attitudes to the narrative, narrator and narratee in their fictional works. One can say that "ultimately the meaning of metafiction depends on the novelist's vision of experience"⁽⁹⁾.

Analysis

The first critical studies of metafiction were undertaken by Jean Recardou and Lucien Dallenbach in France, and Robert Scholes in America, but it was only with Robert Alter's *Partial Magic: The Novel as a self-Conscious Genre* (1975) "that the critical implications of narrative narcissism began to be confronted"⁽¹⁰⁾. He bases his study on the hypothesis that fiction is fiction, and not reality. From the Renaissance to the present time, realism has been qualified and complicated by the novelists' belief in this hypothesis. Alter's framework depends on a dialectic between fiction and reality taking Cervantes's (1547-1616) *Don Quixote* (1605 & 1615) as a basis for the realization that fiction is fiction; and then developing to trace that in the eighteenth and the twentieth century novels. It is only in the realism of the nineteenth century that the novelistic self-consciousness is lost. Alter believes that this is due to "the imaginative involvement with history"⁽¹¹⁾. Bergonzi has a different point of view and he attributes the loss of the self-consciousness in the nineteenth-century novel to its novelists' concern with their own vision of life. They were primarily concerned with the impact of human experience on manners and morals; and they reflected the materialistic points of view of their age in their examination of man's relation to others. But in my opinion, the critic who best

articulates the exact reason of the loss of self-consciousness in the nineteenth century is Gabriel Josipovici. He asserts that the reason of the self-consciousness is the eighteenth and the twentieth-century novelists' "dominant conception of art as artifact in contrast to the nineteenth-century view of art as imitation"⁽¹²⁾. The Victorian readers expected a representation of their daily life in any novel; and it was this strong impulse to read about daily life by ordinary people that helped to create the English novel and sustain it during the nineteenth century. Consequently and for the sake of popularity, the Victorian novelists identified themselves with their age, and were its spokesmen; and what they aspired to achieve was to present a picture of their life to amuse their readers and gain their approval.

According to Alter, Cervantes, Henry Fielding (1707-54) and Laurence Sterne (1713-68) are the first self-conscious novelists. His evidence is their usage of

the ostentatious narrator, beginning with Cervantes' mitotic multiplication of narrators and commentators, through to Fielding's urbanly ironic contriver to the Zany Jugglers of narrative Convention in Sterne⁽¹³⁾.

In *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), Sterne stresses that literary conventions mean misrepresentation of reality, but without them literary product will be a "mere word-Salad"⁽¹⁴⁾. For him, the only remedy for that is to keep his readers all the time conscious of the limitations and falsity of these conventions while reading his text. Though Sterne is influenced by the self-consciousness of Cervantes and Fieldings' novels, he adds something of his own. With him self-consciousness becomes "no longer a device or a technique but a fundamental problematic both literary and philosophical"⁽¹⁵⁾. Fielding's narrators in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749) appear as "artificers in a variety of ingenious and elegantly ironic ways"⁽¹⁶⁾, but with Sterne's narrator in *Tristram Shandy* "the stumbling chase of a self trying to catch its own or any experience through an act of written communication becomes the true plot of the novel"⁽¹⁷⁾. Within his text, the discussion of different kinds of critics and readers, of fictional conventions and the black and blank pages "make us aware of novel-writing as a highly complicated activity of construction with the materials of conventions"⁽¹⁸⁾.

Concerning the twentieth-century self-conscious novelists, Alter claims that they do not form a school or a movement; even the influence on them from their predecessors is unclear. "Scattered over the continents they are an odd mixture"⁽¹⁹⁾.

On the other hand, Linda Hutcheon starts her study of metafiction with the hypothesis that *Don Quixote* is not only the first realistic novel, but also the first self-reflective one. Her study differs from Alter's in relation to nineteenth century realism. Her framework depends on "dialectical literary progression from one kind of mimesis to another"⁽²⁰⁾. As the narrative being a part of the novel action, Hutcheon stresses her rejection of any kind of "split between process (the story telling) and product (the story told)"⁽²¹⁾. While metafiction is a mimesis of process, the nineteenth century realism is a mimesis of product, and for this reason Linda Hutcheon's literary dialectic

Rather than positing a break in novelistic self-consciousness in the last century and then a modern revival of it ... would suggest a continuum but a gradually evolving one that has logically culminated in metafiction⁽²²⁾.

According to her, the loss of self-consciousness in the nineteenth-century novel has paved gradually and logically the way for the emergence of metafiction.

As metafiction involves both "interpretation" and "deconstruction"⁽²³⁾, writing fiction and commenting on it, it "breaks down the distinction between 'creation' and 'criticism'"⁽²⁴⁾. In accomplishing this, metafiction helps both novelists and critics to understand not only the main elements of fiction in a better way, but also its relation to their contemporary world as well.

Novelists and critics alike have come to realize that a moment of crisis can also be seen as a moment of recognition: recognition that although the assumptions about the novel based on an extension of a nineteenth-century realist view of the world may no longer be viable, the novel itself is positively flourishing⁽²⁵⁾.

Moreover, metafiction exposes the reason for the instability of the novel in general as it depends in its construction on the presentation and apprehension of everyday forms of communication. There is no particular language of fiction.

languages of memoirs journals, diaries, histories, conversational registers, legal records, journalism, documentary ... compete for privilege. They question and relativize each other to such an extent that the 'language of fiction' is always if often covertly, self-conscious ... [it is] referred to this process of relativization as the 'dialogic' potential of the novel⁽²⁶⁾.

But the realism of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries has not helped this 'dialogic' nature of the language of fiction to come into being. The conflict of languages is not there due to the presence of the omniscient narrator. Metafiction is against this as it "hinders the emergence of the real identity of the novel as a genre"⁽²⁷⁾.

To reach its goal, metafiction never abandons the conventions of the novel; on the contrary, it depends on them in the process of its construction. Following this strategy, metafiction indirectly encourages its readers to discover its identity by presenting to them some of the traditional conventions of the novel with which they are familiar. In other words, metafiction aspires to reach "defamiliarization" by having a "familiar base"⁽²⁸⁾. It uses old forms to reach a new result. The techniques of nineteenth century realism and old romance, like the omniscient narrator and the final ending are there to be defamiliarized by presenting "counter-techniques to undermine [their] authority"⁽²⁹⁾, such as the multiple narrators and the alternative endings. In this way the reader can understand metafiction easily through its use of old techniques and at the same time enjoys its innovation. While it never ignores the realistic conventions, dissects and reexamines them; in addition to that it uses them as a "background against which the experimental strategies can foreground themselves"⁽³⁰⁾. It takes as its main responsibility the establishment of a form that is "culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers"⁽³¹⁾. Each metafictional novel presents its individual innovation against the conventions of the novel tradition to shed light on the ultimate difference between the sense of chaos and alienation of the contemporary world, and the traditional forms of realism, which are irrelevant to contemporary experience. Metafictional writers concentrate on this attitude and strategy for they know perfectly well that "redundancy"⁽³²⁾ is essential for any literary text to function properly and find its place in our memory. And the only means to achieve redundancy is through the presence of such familiar conventions.

"Without redundancy texts are read and forgotten. They cannot unite to form a literary 'movement' because they exist only at the moment of reading"⁽³³⁾.

All metafictional novelists reach the conclusion that their reality is completely different from nineteenth century reality, and that the novel's realistic conventions are no longer relevant to contemporary experience. They come to believe that if fiction goes on using its traditional forms, it will die. But "far from 'dying', the novel has reached a mature recognition of its existence as writing, which can only ensure its continued viability in and relevance to a contemporary world"⁽³⁴⁾. To the majority of critics, even the work of the metafictionists in the early seventies has represented the death of the novel as a genre. This negative attitude did not last long due to the fact that eventually these critics "have a name for such works. [and] labels are always comforting"⁽³⁵⁾. Such labels as metafiction, self-conscious novel, self-reflective novel or narcissistic-narrative help them to assign and discuss this kind of fiction. In spite of this, the experimental metafiction has been vulnerable to criticism because of its self-reflective nature and its lack of a particular self-identity all through the different changes in the modern and contemporary world. In fact, "it is this ... openness and flexibility which has allowed the novel remarkably to survive and adapt to social change for the last 300 years"⁽³⁶⁾. Critics fail to see the positiveness of self-conscious fiction, and regard it "as a form of the self-indulgence and decadence characteristic of the exhaustion of any artistic form or genre"⁽³⁷⁾. Contrary to that, metafictional writers presume that the only solution to the dilemma of contemporary fiction is to create a form that "theorizes about itself"⁽³⁸⁾. In this way, the genre will have its new identity and validity in a new society, whose cultural reality is no longer capable of being expressed by the old conventions of the novel. Thus, as mentioned before, metafiction shows self-consciousness not only of its own being, but also of its culture as a whole.

During the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries novelists were blessed with a stable society to a certain extent, and they "always finally integrated into the social structure"⁽³⁹⁾. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, they couldn't attain their individuality without struggling and opposing their social institutions and conventions, and were ultimately faced with "alienation ... and mental dissolution"⁽⁴⁰⁾. Hence while the nineteenth century novels depended on the established beliefs and values of a stable society, modern fiction of the early twentieth century had a different reaction to the loss of such beliefs and values in their actual world. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), James Joyce (1882-1941) and others abandoned the traditional conventions. According to modernism, the plot, the chronological order, the omniscient narrator ... etc. became old fashion, but again some conventional critics and novelists of that time wrongly prophesied that this was the end of the novel.

The loss of order at the beginning of the twentieth century led modernists to search for it at a deeper level of the mind. In contemporary society, novelists are beset by greater problems and they cannot identify the objects of opposition, that confront them due to the fact that they are "more diverse and more effectively concealed or mystified"⁽⁴¹⁾. The only solution for them is to turn to *the novel itself* and to examine and dissect it in order to find out its valid relationship to reality. Thus, the self-conscious writers have a

specific attitude, and through creating novels, they believe that they are re-establishing order in their real world and creating another better reality. Consequently, it is the process of writing that is the main concern of the metafictionists. They abandon the stream of consciousness and the interior monologue, because "contemporary reflexivity implies an awareness both of language and metalanguage, of consciousness and writing"⁽⁴²⁾. Thus, though post-modernism shares some of the philosophies of modernism, yet it does not concentrate on the mind as the basis of the novel. This quick survey of the history of fiction in the last three centuries clarifies that "The permanent changes in fiction ... more often have been, and are more likely to be, modifications of sensibilities and attitudes rather than dramatic innovations in form and technique"⁽⁴³⁾.

In spite of the fact that metafiction is one form of post-modernism, nearly all the contemporary experimental novels have metafictional tendencies by explaining in one way or another the process of their creation and suspending their readers' conventional expectations. Though the anti-novel is another term used to describe contemporary experimental fiction written as a protest against fictional accepted norms, yet it is "too wide to serve as a description of metafictional works because not considerable number of novels appear as protests against established artistic norms without possessing metafictional characteristics"⁽⁴⁴⁾. This means that the anti-novel may deal with the making of fiction, but it is not its primary concern. John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury use the term "the introverted novel" to describe some of the contemporary novels of Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977), Muriel Spark (1918-) and Gunter Grass (1922-). They differentiate between the twentieth century narrative introversion, and the self-consciousness of Cervantes and Sterne in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. While the later concentrates on the autonomy of each fundamental of the narrative situation: the narrator, the narratee, the narrative ... etc., the narrative introversion of the twentieth century draws "attention to the autonomy of the fictive structure itself"⁽⁴⁵⁾. But Ignier Christensen, in *The Meaning of Metafiction*, thinks that these two terms are both applicable to such novels in the different centuries. Surfiction, fabulation and self-begetting novels are also different terms of self-conscious fiction. Similarly to metafiction all these terms refer to kinds of fiction that concern themselves with their own structure and language in spite of their minor distinctions. Metafiction has most of the strategies of these terms as it is

not so much a sub-genre of the novel as a tendency within the novel which operates through exaggeration of the tensions and oppositions inherent in all novels: of frame and frame-break, of technique and counter-technique, of construction and deconstruction of illusion⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Though this tension is clear in most of the contemporary novels, it is the main concern of metafiction. For example, in the self-begetting novel, as "an account, usually first person, of the development of a character to the point at which he is able to take up his pen and compose the novel we have just finished reading"⁽⁴⁷⁾, the emphasis is on the development of the narrator and his consciousness rather than on the novel writing. Iris Murdoch's (1919-) *Under the Net* (1954), Lawrence Durrell's (1912-) *The Alexandria Quartet* (1961) and Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) are good examples in proving this.

The French Lieutenant's Woman by John Fowles, the contemporary English novelist, is the first solid representative of metafiction. Fowles produces his innovation under the guise of a Victorian novel, that enables him to dissect the cruel hypocrisy and the repressed sexuality of that age as well as its fictional conventions. While Sarah Woodruff, the heroine and the woman of the title, "recalls the 'forbidden woman' of a number of Victorian novels"⁽⁴⁸⁾, the hero, Charles Smithson, "an upright and honourable man", is "an archetypal Victorian hero"⁽⁴⁹⁾. Even the minor characters, the dialogue, the plot development and the omniscient narrator are all taken from the Victorian novel in general. The hero and the heroines' struggle against their age's hypocrisy and tyranny is similar to their creator's struggle against the literary conventions of the novel to achieve a new one representing the contemporary world and not far from its realities. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles's theory of metafiction is manifested in his concepts of reality, freedom and history and their relation to fiction.

As the metafictional writers' goal has been to "explore a theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction"⁽⁵⁰⁾, this exploration involves the studying of the relationship between fiction and reality. Metafiction stresses that uncertainty marks this relationship due to the effect of the novelist on his work in general. Since "the observer always changes the observed"⁽⁵¹⁾, novelists, as human beings, cannot present an identical and objective reality. Like all metafictional writers, John Fowles is engaged with the problem on whether telling a story is telling lies, and this engagement draws him to examine the relation of fictional world to the real world. Concerning this, philosophers fall into two categories in defining the ontological status of fiction. First, "the falsity theorists, for whom fiction is clearly lies"⁽⁵²⁾. Second, "the non-referentiality theorists ... who argue that it is simply inappropriate to talk about the truth status of literary fiction"⁽⁵³⁾. Some metafictional writers adopt these attitudes, but John Fowles has created a third category by referring to fiction as "world as real as, but other than the world that is. Or was"⁽⁵⁴⁾. This means that metafiction is not an imitation of reality, and instead of hiding the disparity between fiction and reality, it exposes it.

Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* reveals this disparity in the characters' various ways of interpreting realities, and in their different uses of language, that give rise to endless misunderstanding. While Toby draws a map to describe exactly what has happened on the Siege of Namur, Walter, on the other hand, uses names and words to represent reality. But it is only Tristram, who knows perfectly well that the gap between fiction and reality cannot be bridged, and he accomplished this by satirizing the literary conventions. Though Sterne's attitude toward the relation between fiction and reality is identical with John Fowles and other contemporary metafictionists, yet he does not "consider his fictional world as a universe in its own right, of equal worth to that of a Supreme Creator. His fiction is a means to escape and mitigate the evils of the world, but no alternative to it"⁽⁵⁵⁾. The reason behind this is that while Sterne's world was stable and quiet, the metafictionists' contemporary world is marked by restlessness, instability and conflict. As a result of seeing their actual world "Crumbling around" them, they create metafiction as "an alternative and no copy of [it]"⁽⁵⁶⁾. Hence the construction of metafiction means a construction of different universes, and the establishment of worlds other than

the common-sense world of everyday reality. Fowles reaches a conclusion that this can only be achieved "by preventing the reader from settling into any given context and by making him or her aware of possible alternatives to this 'commonsense' reality"⁽⁵⁷⁾. He is absolutely right, as this is actually what one faces in real life; infinite possibilities are always there to suggest the futility of any kind of imitation.

Modernists as well as post-modernists believe that everything, whether in life or fiction, is framed. But metafiction "foregrounds 'framing' as a problem, examining frame procedures in the construction of the real world and of novels"⁽⁵⁸⁾. It tackles many questions such as what precisely a frame is and how it separates reality from fiction. The conventions of the novels are their frames, and "frames in life operate like conventions in novels: they facilitate action and involvement in a situation"⁽⁵⁹⁾. Hence when we analyze frames of life, we analyze life's conventional organization. Modernism demonstrates that nothing can be finished and that life goes on, but metafiction exposes "the arbitrary nature of beginnings of boundaries", and since life and novels are constructed through frames "it is finally impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins"⁽⁶⁰⁾. In other words, metafiction stresses that nothing in life or fiction is "'fluid' or 'random'"⁽⁶¹⁾. Through metafiction, "we have become aware that neither historical experiences nor literary fiction are unmediated or unprocessed"⁽⁶²⁾. It is clear that through all the literary developments, from realism to modernism, frames are essential in all novels, but they "are explicitly laid bare in metafiction"⁽⁶³⁾, to stress that even the difference between content and form cannot be discovered without a frame. In the novels of Anthony Trollope (1815-82) and George Eliot (1819-80), there is a frame-break in having the voice of the narrator commenting and directing the actions and characters of the novel. But we cannot consider them as metafiction, because their frame-break suggests that there is a connection between the real and the fictional worlds, and that one is a continuation of the other. The frame-break of metafiction suggests the distinctness of the real and the fictional worlds, and "expose[s] the literary conventions that disguise this distinctness"⁽⁶⁴⁾.

The presentation of the minutest details is one aspect of the frame-break in metafiction, and John Fowles accomplishes this in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. By having these details mentioned by his narrator to the extent of describing the small contents of the heroine's handbag, Fowles destroys the illusion of reality, and the reader cannot sustain that, what he is reading, is reality. In fact, "we can read novels only because of our suspension of disbelief"⁽⁶⁵⁾, and the reader usually knows that what he is reading is not reality, but he suppresses this knowledge to increase his enjoyment. But by handling fiction as a historical document, Fowles breaks our illusion of reality and opens the door of fiction. Hence "the frame-break while appearing to bridge the gap between fiction and reality, in fact lays it bare"⁽⁶⁶⁾.

Another aspect of the frame-break in Fowles's novel is that its narrator acknowledges that "the characters [he creates] never [exist] outside [his] own mind"⁽⁶⁷⁾. Consequently, the reader becomes sure that the teller of the story is its inventor and not a recorder of events that really happen. In this way, the metafictional writer "occupies an ontological level superior to his world; by breaking the frame around his world, [he] foregrounds

his own superior reality. The metafictional gesture of frame breaking is, in other words, a form of superrealism"⁽⁶⁸⁾. And the reader, in his turn, finds himself reconsidering his idea of what is assumed to be reality, and at the same time will go on living in a world built out of common sense and routine. As a metafictionist, what John Fowles aspires to in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, is that his readers will do this with a new realization of how the meaning and values of that world have been constructed and how they can be changed or challenged. Thus, this novel "aims to unsettle our convictions about the relative status of truth and fiction"⁽⁶⁹⁾.

A third aspect of metafictional frame-break is the presentation of alternative and untraditional endings for the same novel. As "fiction is primarily an elaborate way of pretending, and pretending is a fundamental element of play and games"⁽⁷⁰⁾, Fowles, like other metafictionists, makes his reader aware of his role as a player in that game; and to choose an ending for the novel is an example of that role for the reader as a player. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* has three endings; the first one is imagined by Charles Smithson, the hero, and does not belong to the actual world of the text; the other two belong to the novel's "real world, and have the same ontological status. They are mutually exclusive"⁽⁷¹⁾. In one of them the hero and heroine are reunited, while in the other they are separated. The outcome of this duplicity is that "Fowles's world flickers, apalesces at precisely the point where we conventionally expect either maximum clarity and definition (a closed ending) or total opacity (an open ending)"⁽⁷²⁾. The second ending is more convincing as "it fulfils a deep narrative logic forbidding easy consolation"⁽⁷³⁾, but it dissatisfies the reader's expectations. Peter Conradi appreciates this ending more, because it "seduces and betrays us exactly as Sarah seduces and then betrays Charles," and though, as readers, we are "disappointed ... perhaps but [we become] freer and better men"⁽⁷⁴⁾. No one argue about the happy reconciliation as a desirable ending for any reader, but when it is unbelievable or unsuitable to the whole design of the novel, and when it does not correspond or respect its readers' minds, it becomes undesirable and disgusting. Hence, what determines the effectiveness of any ending is its ability to educate and change its readers into better human beings with enlightened minds and refine feelings. And according to me, this is what John Fowles has accomplished in this ending of his novel.

Human freedom poses a problem for all metafictionists including Fowles; and his preoccupation with it is clear in his theory of fiction to the extent of "retain[ing] modified forms of realism"⁽⁷⁵⁾. What interests Fowles in presenting three alternative endings for *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, is how they are related to his enjoyment of the idea of freedom. By doing that, he determines "to establish his right not to satisfy the expectations that his use of Victorian conventions has raised"⁽⁷⁶⁾. Though he presents his readers with three endings, yet he believes that life has an infinity of possible endings.

Fowles's exploration of the idea of freedom is accompanied by his assumption that characters in fiction cannot be free. According to him, the pretence of the novelists that their characters are free is just a game, because every novelists is still the God of his universe, but "what has changed is that [they] are no longer the Gods of the victorian

image ..., with freedom [their] first principle, not authority"⁽⁷⁷⁾. In spite of Fowles's acknowledgement that his characters cannot be free, because they are trapped within his text, he believes that they are free to be reconstructed in other people's imagination or texts. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles adopts both the realistic and Victorian conventions, and he has two choices of mystification and revelation, but his characters do not have this choice especially those who are labelled and defined. For example, Charles Smithson, "the dilettante palaeontologist and leisured aristocratic hero"⁽⁷⁸⁾, is led by Sarah Woodruff, the heroine, to a recognition that "each minute requires a fresh choice, a new direction"⁽⁷⁹⁾. It is a difficult lesson for such a passive personality like Charles, who is "trapped within both the script of history and the script of the fiction we are reading"⁽⁸⁰⁾. Though the characters of the novel enjoy different degrees of freedom, yet Charles, the hero,

moves between the pole of unfreedom represented by the public and fixed subjection ... to historical values on the one hand, and the pole of freedom, suggested by the secret but equally fixed 'autonomy' of Sarah, on the other⁽⁸¹⁾.

But, in my opinion, his passivity determines his actions and reactions to those around him especially Sarah, who, in a moment of frustration, runs away from him.

The third-person narrative with the first-person intrusion gives Fowles more freedom within the historical context of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* than the first-person narrative, with which he begins his novel. In spite of its "omniscient ... [and] non-democratic nature"⁽⁸²⁾, right from the first chapter, the narrator establishes a strong relation with his reader by using the pronoun "I & you" without mentioning any other human personality. his "voice is the book's true hero"⁽⁸³⁾. In such third-person/first person narrative, the fictional world is suddenly broken by the narrator who is in fact from a different world. For example, though they belong to different ontological levels, and in spite of the narrator's acknowledgement that he is "working in the age of Alain Robbe Grillet and Ronald Barth ... the theoreticians of the nouveau Roman"⁽⁸⁴⁾, yet in chapter fifty-five the narrator and Charles Smithson, the hero of the novel, share the same compartment on a train journey. This confrontation between the author and his characters is "a topos of postmodernist writing: the topos of the face to face interview"⁽⁸⁵⁾, and it may be either pronounced or muted. The muted confrontation is presented in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* when the self-conscious narrator, on looking at his protagonist during that train journey "wonders how he should dispose of the poor fellow as he weighs the conventions of the Victorian novel, which he is recreating against the critical strictures of the French New Novelists"⁽⁸⁶⁾.

Moreover, Fowles, as a narrator, breaks the illusion by intruding his views as a twentieth century individual in a text representing the nineteenth century. For example, he declares that "Charles called himself a Darwinist, and yet he had not really understood Darwin. But then, nor had Darwin"⁽⁸⁷⁾. Another example is when Charles, after making love with Sarah, is described as "a city struck out of a quiet sky by an atom bomb"⁽⁸⁸⁾, though the atom bomb has not yet been invented. Hence in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, "many of effects play on the gap between historical explanation and secrecy, with the folly of narrative wisdom itself on display"⁽⁸⁹⁾, and finally the "the effect is a

startling mixture of prospect and retrospect"⁽⁹⁰⁾. Even the landscape of Lyme Regis, Dorset, the setting of the novel, is described as viewed from the air, in spite of the fact that the usage of aircraft is confined to the twentieth century. In addition to that, Lyme's evenings are characterized by the absence of television and cinema. This means that Fowles's novel "practices another form of self-flaunting creative anachronism in its allusions to various twentieth-century referents: ... but ... the narrator, being our contemporary is perfectly justified in making such allusions"⁽⁹¹⁾. But the illusion is completely shattered when Fowles refers to twentieth-century personalities in his nineteenth-century text. For example Charles Smithson works in the same library with Karl Marx, and Sarah Woodruff lives with the Rossettis. In this way, "the fictional characters ... are given the same ontological status as the 'real' characters [and] the 'real' characters who exist or existed are fictionalized"⁽⁹²⁾. In my estimation, the first person intrusion of his twentieth-century perspective, the confrontation between him as a narrator and his character within the text, and the reference to the twentieth-century real personalities in a nineteenth-century text are the most prominent achievements of Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Readers of traditional novels are shocked by them, but the amusement and enjoyment they get out of experiencing them for the first time surpass their shock.

Being oriented by the contemporary French theories, but having the gifts of a historical novelist, leads Fowles to write *The French Lieutenant's Woman* as a parody of a historical novel set in the Victorian period, only to stress his objection to it by "ironizing and exposing its conventions"⁽⁹³⁾. The historian usually takes his readers to a past world without referring to his own contemporary perspective in his text, but Fowles, both as a historian and metafictionist, violates this rule. As a result, "the research necessary for historical fiction is laid bare by extensive quotations from sources, rather than being invisibly woven into the narrative"⁽⁹⁴⁾. In spite of that, one should not ignore the fact that Fowles relies on epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter in his novel to show his knowledge of the Victorians keeping in mind that such epigraphs are a true comment on the age from its own perspective. These multiple perspectives, his own and others prove that he knows the Victorians in a way which they could not possibly know themselves. The setting of the novel in time is 1867, eight years after the publication of Darwin's (1809-82) *Origin of Species* (1859). This allows the hero, Charles Smithson, to be identified with the revolutionary theory. He analyzes his society depending on this theory, and accordingly finds out that the class of gentlemen, to which he himself belongs, is in danger because of the development of science and trade.

Through the character of the heroine, Sarah Woodruff, the theme of history and freedom is thoroughly explored. She presents "Fowles's philosophy of freedom and fiction. She is 'mythical': she stands outside 'history' and outside fiction ... But she achieves this condition in the novel through deliberate artifice"⁽⁹⁵⁾. She introduces herself to others as an outcast: - 'a fallen Woman' - in order to be outside conventional Victorian society, but, in fact, she is a virgin. She is similar to Fowles, who achieves fictional freedom by being outside, and at the same time exploiting the conventions of Victorian realism. In spite of the fact that Fowles admits that "she is possibly an aspect of his psy-

chic creativity, his anima, yet it is in the presentation of Sarah that Fowles, perhaps unintentionally, violates his own principles of freedom⁽⁹⁶⁾. This exactly corresponds to Carl Jung's (1875-1961) psychological theory; Sarah is Fowles's anima, his female consciousness, his shadow, the dark depth of his unconscious, which violates his being at certain moments. To mark the relation of fictional possession and fictional freedom, Fowles asserts that Sarah's character has haunted him; and one can say that she possesses him while he is unconscious just as he possesses her while he is conscious.

Mystery surrounds Sarah as the reader cannot enter her mind, and is not permitted to read her thoughts. Fowles, as a narrator of his novel, does not allow her voice to be heard through his own. Sarah "is a figure signifying the postmodern future and the defeat of systematic thought"⁽⁹⁷⁾. While other characters in the novel are defined and known like Charles Smithson, Ernestina Freeman and Mrs. Poulteney, Sarah's "resistance to interpretation is connected .. with her capacity to educate"⁽⁹⁸⁾. According to her presentation in the novel, our reaction to Sarah is confused, because she is not only 'a fallen woman' of the Victorian novel, but also a victim of the social forces and pressures which are exposed and dissected by the contemporary perspective of John Fowles. Poor but educated, Sarah is taken under the patronage of the rich, pious but domineering Mrs. Poulteney after leaving her job as a governess due to her scandal with the French soldier. Having no friends makes her choose Charles as her confidant, and she confesses to him how she has lost her virtue in her relation with that soldier. But even this consolation of Charles's friendship is not allowed by Mrs. Poulteney, who eventually dismisses her from her household.

As Charles characterizes the only help for her, Sarah manipulates him, and this is clear in her preparations for his visit to her in Exeter. The buying of a new nightgown and a bandage of the seemingly sprained ankle is a good evidence. Dr. Gorgan warns Charles by referring to her as "mentally diseased"⁽⁹⁹⁾. Gorgan's judgement of Sarah is based on the opinion of Lyme Regis society, but the modern reader, similarly to the author, can explain her condition as a result of her "social powerlessness"⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ depending in that on the studies of Darwin and Freud. Her hysterical behaviour gives her a kind of control over her fate, but places her out of the moral sphere of the Victorian world. She becomes "the author of her own life. The lies that she tells Charles may be seen as necessary fictions, embodying truths if not conveying facts"⁽¹⁰¹⁾. Later on, when Charles visits her at Endicott Family Hotel in Exeter and they make love, he is shocked to discover that she is still a virgin. This revelation marks the climax of the novel, that fixes Sarah as a "tricksterfigure, deliberately deceiving, confusing, seductive ... existing necessarily in a state of 'alienation'"⁽¹⁰²⁾. After seducing Charles, Sarah disappears, and consequently Charles's social position is destroyed by this seduction and the breaking of his engagement to the rich Ernestina Freeman. A few years later, he finds Sarah together with their baby-girl. Now she is no longer 'the fallen woman' of the Victorian age; she is a respectable member of the Rosetti household, "the New Woman, in dress, attitudes and independence"⁽¹⁰³⁾. She has been helped to be so by people "who distance themselves successfully from the social conventions of their time"⁽¹⁰⁴⁾.

Conclusion

Finally, by reference to its few critical studies, metafiction can be regarded as the novel of the future, that theorizes about itself while being written to convey not only its technical innovations but its writer's message as well. Consequently, it is of great help to its readers to understand both the main constituents of fiction and the realities of contemporary world, to which the nineteenth century fictional conventions are no longer relevant. In achieving this, metafiction has an original strategy, it never abandons the old conventions of the novel, but it depends on them to establish its innovations. It dissects and re-examines them to prove their uselessness in expressing the sense of chaos and alienation of the contemporary world. In spite of all its merits, metafiction is met with harsh critical reactions, that anticipate it as a step towards the death of the novel as a genre. Its self-reflectiveness together with its lack of a particular self-identity all through the different changes in the contemporary world help to create such negative critical reactions. In fact, metafictionists prove that theorizing about itself is the only outlet for the novel out of its dilemma in the second half of the twentieth century. The loss of order, the sense of loneliness and alienation and the human struggle in their actual world make the writing of novels, for them, a means to re-establish order and to re-create other better realities.

By the application of the metafictional theories to John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, this study proves that it is a satisfactory example of metafiction as it produces its innovations under the guise of a Victorian novel. Through it, Fowles explores his concepts of reality, freedom and history and their relations to fiction. This metafictional novel successfully exposes the difference between fiction and reality by breaking its frames and laying them bare. Moreover, it is clear that in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles enjoys a considerable amount of freedom as a metafictionist. The first-person intrusion and the alternative endings prove that. Having the gifts of a historical novelist, leads Fowles to write *The French Lieutenant's Woman* as a parody of a historical novel set in the Victorian period to express his objection to it by exposing its conventions. Fowles violates the rule of historical writing by inserting his own contemporary perspective within it. Through his heroine, Sarah Woodruff, the theme of history and freedom is thoroughly explored. She signifies the new woman of the contemporary world, who can overcome her status as a victim of social forces and pressures. Her hysterical behaviour and lies give her a kind of control over her fate in spite of the fact that they place her outside the normal sphere of the Victorian world. Finally, she succeeds in becoming a respectable independent member in a new social surrounding, where the useless social conventions of that period are discarded.

In addition, this study proves that metafiction effectively succeeds in changing the conventional roles of writers and readers, as they no longer entertain their former traditional functions in fictional creation. While the reader is "the one who extracts, invents, creates a meaning and an order for the people in fiction," the writer "stands[s] on equal footing with [his] readers in their efforts ... to give sense to the fiction of life"⁽¹⁰⁵⁾. Consequently, such contemporary readers, who miss the conversation with someone else in their actual life, will eventually satisfy this need by the enjoyment of reading

metafiction; and in this way, one can prophesy that metafiction will gain more popularity in the future. Thus

This form of fiction is worth studying not only because of its contemporary emergence but also because of the insights it offers into both the representational nature of all fiction and the literary history of the novel as genre. By studying metafiction, one is, in effect, studying that which gives the novel its identity⁽¹⁰⁶⁾.

Notes

1. **Patricia Waugh**, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, London: Routledge, (1988), p. 2.
2. **Inger Christensen**, *The Meaning of Metafiction*, Bergen, Universitets Forlaget, (1983), p. 9.
3. **Robert Scholes**, The Fictional Criticism of the Future, *Triquarterly*, XXXIV: 237, 1975.
- 4.5. **Linda Hutcheon**, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, London, Methuen, (1985), p. 1.
6. **Inger, Christensen**, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- 8, 9. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
10. **Linda Hutcheon**, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
11. **Robert Alter**, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a self-Conscious Genre*, Berkeley, University of California Press, (1978), p. 89.
12. **Gabriel Josipovici**, *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction*, London, (1971), p. 289.
13. **Robert Alter**, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 15-18. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
- 20-22. **Linda Hutcheon**, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- 23,24. **Patricia Waugh**, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 28,29. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 30,31. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 32,33. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
35. **Linda Hutcheon**, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- 36,37. **Patricia Waugh**, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- 38-41. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
43. Interview with John Barth in Joe David Bellamy, *The New Fiction: Interviews with Innovative American Writers*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, (1978) p. 2.
44. **Iger Christensen**, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
45. **John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury** (ed.), The Introverted Novel, *Modernism 1890-1930*, Harmondsworth; (1976), p. 395.
46. **Patricia Waugh**, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
47. **Steven G. Kellman**, *The Self-Begetting Novel*, New York, Columbia University Press, (1980), p. 3.
- 48,49. **Marguerite Alexander**, *Flights from Realism*, London, Edward Arnold, (1990), p. 128.
50. **Patricia Waugh**, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 52,53. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
54. **John Fowles**, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, London, Trial Panther, (1985), p. 86.
- 55,56. **Inger Christensen**, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
57. **Patricia Waugh**, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 61-63. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- 65,66. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
67. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (FLW), p. 85.
68. **Brian McHale**, *Postmodernist Fiction*, London: Methuen, (1987), p. 197.
- 69,70. **Patricia Waugh**, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
- 71,72. **Brian McHale**, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
73. **Peter Conradi**, *Contemporary Writers: John Fowles*, London, Methuen, (1983), p. 67.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- 75,76. **Marguerite Alexander**, p. 131.
77. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (FLW), p. 86.
- 78-80. **Patricia Waugh**, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
81. **Peter Conradi**, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
84. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (FLW), p. 85.
85. **Brian McHale**, *op. cit.*, p. 213.
86. **Robert Alter**, *op. cit.*, p. XIII.
87. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (FLW), p. 47.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
89. **Peter Conradi**, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
91. **Brian McHale**, *op. cit.*, p. 93-94.
92. **Alison Lee**, *Realism and Power: Postmodern British Fiction*, London, Routledge, (1990), p. 46.
93. **Marguerite Alexander**, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
95. **Patricia Waugh**, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
97. **Edmund J. Smyth**, *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, London, Batsford, (1991), p. 146.
98. **Peter Conradi**, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
99. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (FLW), p. 196.
100. **Marguerite Alexander**, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
102. **Patricia Waugh**, *op. cit.*, p. 126.
- 103,104. **Marguerite Alexander**, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
105. **Raymond Federman** (ed.), *Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow*, Chicago, The Swallow Press, (1975), p. 14.
106. **Patricia Waugh**, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

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إمرأة الملازم الفرنسي « جون فاولز » : كنموذج لما وراء الرواية

هند رضا جمل الليل

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المستخلص . يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة «ما وراء الرواية» كظاهرة أدبية حديثة في العالم المعاصر لاختبار مدى فعاليتها وملائمتها لهذا العصر من خلال تطبيق نظريات هذه الظاهرة على رواية *إمرأة الملازم الفرنسي* لجون فاولز ، والتي تعتبر نموذجاً مثالياً لما وراء الرواية فهي تقدم تجديداتها تحت ستار الرواية الفكتورية ، مما مكنها من تحليل شروء ذلك العصر وعدم جدوى تقاليده الروائية في عالمنا الحاضر . وفي هذه الرواية أيضاً يقدم فاولز نظريته حول ما وراء الرواية من خلال مفهومه للحقيقة والتاريخ والحرية وعلاقتهم جميعاً بالرواية .